

Follow Michelangelo's art around Florence

Situated on the banks of the Arno River and set among the splendid landscape of Tuscany, Florence, in Italian Firenze, is immediately captivating.

Considered the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance, Florence is famous for its magnificent art, architecture, wine, and cuisine.

In the 14th -16th century the city was a cradle of art, attracting artists from throughout Italy. It is the home of Dante, Machiavelli, and Leonardo; the city of Medici with paintings from Botticelli; even Raphael—one of the world's greatest painters—would not have been Raphael without his Florentine education.

But most of all, Florence is the city of Michelangelo.

It is in Florence where a young Michelangelo was raised and spent many years creating many of his masterpieces, and always returning to the city. Florence, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, is compact and its attractions are easily reached by foot. The city seems to reveal its treasures with every step. Following the artwork of Michelangelo in the city can easily be done in a day, allowing visitors to view many other attractions at the same time.

Michelangelo's main attraction in Florence is his "David." Considered one of his best works, along with the Pieta in The Vatican, David was sculpted before Michelangelo turned 30. He was asked by the Consuls of the Guild of Wool to complete an unfinished project begun 40 years earlier by Agostino di Duccio. It was a colossal statue portraying David as a symbol of Florentine freedom, and it was to be placed in the Piazza della Signoria, in front of the Palazzo Vecchio.

The statue was moved from that location for preservation reasons (a replica has been placed there), and it is now located in the **Galleria Dell'Academia**.



This is just one of the frescos outside the Duomo.

The Academia museum has been ranked one of the best in Florence for one reason—Michelangelo's David. It is one of the best known works of art in the world, but only when you see it in person can one really admire "The Giant," as it is also known.

The calm and determined strength of his expression and its imposing height of 17 feet make it near impossible to be describe with mere words. Michelangelo's other masterpieces in the museum include a statue of St. Matthew and the Quattro Prigioni (the four prisoners). The collection of pictures in the museum is much less important but includes some early Renaissance works and a Madonna by Botticelli. Visitors are advised to book or purchase museum tickets in advance because the lines during peak season can be up to six hours long. In front of the museum, on Piazza San Marco, there is a nice restaurant, offering a different five-course meal every day, accompanied by different wines. The restaurant's pasta alone is worth a visit.



An overview of the city and Palazzo Vecchio from the top of the 276 ft. high Campanile, designed by Giotto in

A copy of Michelangelo's David now stands in the **Piazza della Signoria**. The place is a unique sculpture gallery, and together with the Palazzo Vecchio, has been the center of Florentine politics. Citizens gathered there when called to a parlamento, or public meeting, by the palace's bell.

Cellini's famous bronze statue of Preseus beheading Medusa is one of the many that stands in the place. Observant movie buffs will notice that a scene from the movie "Hannibal" was filmed in this Piazza. **Palazzo Vecchio**, completed in 1322, is where Michelangelo was supposed to paint a battle fresco opposite his rival Leonardo. The two greatest artists were pitted against one another, but for different reasons both failed to complete their works. The unrealized frescos

remain one of the greatest "what ifs" in art history.

Inside the Palazzo Vecchio, which continues to serve its original role as Florence's town hall, "Victory" by Michelangelo can be found. Behind the Palazzo Vecchio is the **Bargello**. Built in 1255 as the city's town hall, it was later used as a prison and today houses a superb collection of Florentine Renaissance sculptures, with rooms dedicated to the work of Michelangelo, Donatello, Cellini, and other great artists. Michelangelo's first major work, Bacchus, is located there.

Next to Palazzo Vecchio is the **Galleria degli Uffizi**. The museum was one of the first in Europe to assert the modern idea of a museum as a systematically designed exhibition for public viewing. The Uffizi displays nearly 2,000 paintings from the Medieval to Modern Age. Michelangelo's famous painting Holy Family with the Infant St. John the Baptist can be found in the museum. It is interesting that despite his low opinion of painting, Michelangelo created so many influential paintings in the history of Western art, not to mention the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. Considered the most important painting of the 16th century, the Holy Family is the only example of Michelangelo's painting preserved in Florence. It is the painting that first breaks with the convention of showing Christ in the Virgin's lap.

Other masterpieces collected in Uffizi include Giotto's Maesta, Botticelli's Primavera, Leonardo's Annunciation, Raphael's Madonna, and Caravaggio's Sacrifice of Isaac.

Basilica San Lorenzo is a must-see, but not only for Michelangelo's fans. The architectural contrast to the other Florence churches is immediately noticeable. Its origins coincide with those of the Christian era. Later, for over 300 years, it was the parish church of the Medici family.

In 1513 the Medici commissioned Michelangelo to reconstruct the façade of the basilica and adorn it with sculptures. He spent years

creating models and drawings, but his work was always canceled for financial reasons before any real progress had been made. The façade remains unfinished to this day.

Later, Michelangelo was commissioned to do the **Medici Chapel** in the basilica. This project was more fully realized where the artist created both the major sculptures as well as the interior plan. Typically for Michelangelo this exquisite chapel shows incredible attention to the detail. Michelangelo’s monumental funerary figures symbolizing night, day, dawn, and dusk are among his greatest works.

The Biblioteca Laurenziana, also part of the Basilica San Lorenzo was designed by Michelangelo as well. Early in his life, when the Medici were expelled from Florence for a while, Michelangelo hid in a small room underneath San Lorenzo which still can be visited today. Among the other masterpieces in the basilica are the Donatello’s Pulpits and a beautiful fresco by Bronzino. Another sight that is also closely related to Michelangelo is the magnificent gothic church of **Santa Croce**, where the artist is buried.

His body was brought back from Rome to fulfill Michelangelo’s last request—to be buried in his beloved Tuscany. Many other famous Italians such as Leonardo Bruni, Rossini, and Galileo are buried there. Michelangelo never completed the Pieta for his own tomb so the monument around his tomb was designed by Vasari in 1570. Because of how it is situated, the church is really beautiful in the late afternoon when the sun shines on the face of the building.

At the other end of Piazza Santa Croce the Piazza Peruzzi is situated. It is also the location of an outstanding restaurant. It is a great place where, in a romantic Florentine atmosphere, one can enjoy the famous bistecca alla fiorentina with a glass of Chianti Classico. Their famously huge and rare steaks are to me the best steaks one can ever try.

Florence is much more than the sum of its museums and crazy motorcycle drivers. It is a city with spirit carrying the intellectual genius, power, and talent of an age that has yet to be outdone.



A sculpture of Michelangelo can be found in front of the Galleria degli Uffizi.

Together with Rome, it is the city of one the world’s greatest marble sculptors and painters.

Seeing Michelangelo’s works for yourself is simply the only way to begin to admire the rare genius.